

23 August 1984

BOOK SAYS POPE GETS REGULAR BRIEFINGS FROM CIA
BY ANDREW GELLER
NEW YORK

POPE JOHN PAUL II RECEIVES REGULAR BRIEFINGS FROM THE CIA AND THE AGENCY HAS BECOME ONE OF HIS MOST TRUSTED SOURCES; SAYS A BOOK BEING PUBLISHED ABROAD THIS WEEK AND IN THE UNITED STATES NEXT MONTH.

"INCREASINGLY, JOHN PAUL'S DECISIONS, HIS POLICIES, HIS SPEECHES AND PRONOUNCEMENTS TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE CIA BRIEFINGS HE RECEIVES," IT SAYS. "THEY GIVE HIM A POLITICAL OVERVIEW NO OTHER POPE HAS ENJOYED."

THE BOOK, "AVERTING ARMAGEDDON," WAS WRITTEN BY GORDON THOMAS OF IRELAND AND MAX MORGAN-WITTS OF ENGLAND, WHO HAVE COLLABORATED ON NINE OTHER WORKS, INCLUDING AN EARLIER VOLUME ON THE POPE.

IT IS BEING PUBLISHED IN ENGLAND TOMORROW AND IN THE UNITED STATES IN SEPTEMBER.

THE BOOK SAYS THAT BECAUSE OF THE BRIEFINGS, THE POPE LEARNED A WEEK BEFOREHAND THAT THE POLISH TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY WOULD BE OUTLAWED AND ITS LEADER, LECH WALESA, ARRESTED.

"THE CIA CAUTIONED THERE WAS NOTHING JOHN PAUL COULD -- OR SHOULD -- DO ABOUT THESE EVENTS," IT SAYS. "THIS WAS IMPRESSIVE FOREKNOWLEDGE AND THE POPE WAS PROPERLY IMPRESSED."

THE BOOK ALSO SAYS THAT THE CIA BROUGHT THE POPE THE FIRST NEWS -- IN NOVEMBER, 1982 -- THAT SOVIET PRESIDENT LEONID BREZHNEV WAS DEAD AND YURI ANDROPOV HAD TAKEN HIS PLACE.

THOMAS AND MORGAN-WITTS WROTE THAT THE CIA IS "A MAJOR INFLUENCE IN FORMING JOHN PAUL'S VIEW OF THE WORLD" AND THAT IT FIRMLY "RETAINS ITS HOLD AS THE VATICAN'S CHIEF ADVISER FROM THE WORLD OF SECULAR INTELLIGENCE."

BOTH THE CIA AND THE VATICAN DECLINED TO COMMENT ON THE BOOK.

THE AUTHORS SAID THEIR WORK WAS BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH VATICAN AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS AND PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DOCUMENTS.

ELIZABETH ST. JOHN, A SPOKESWOMAN FOR DOUBLEDAY, SAID SOME REVISIONS WERE MADE IN THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT BUT THEY DID NOT INCLUDE EITHER "CONSIDERABLE DELETIONS" OR "SUBSTANTIAL EDITORIAL CHANGES."

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"WE'RE IN A LITIGIOUS SOCIETY; AND WE WANTED TO BE CONFIDENT THERE WERE NO POSSIBILITIES FOR LOOPHOLES. BEING CAUTIOUS HAS BECOME SECOND NATURE TO ALL OF US IN THE PUBLISHING WORLD," SHE SAID OF THE EDITING.

THE BOOK SAYS THE CIA'S INVOLVEMENT WITH JOHN PAUL BEGAN IN NOVEMBER, 1978, AFTER HE HAD BEEN IN OFFICE LESS THAN A MONTH. HE MET THEN WITH THE HEAD OF THE CIA STATION IN ROME.

"THE OFFICER CAREFULLY EXPLAINED THE HELP THE AGENCY WAS EAGER TO OFFER THE POPE: REGULAR ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN INTENTIONS IN CENTRAL EUROPE; WITH PARTICULAR REGARD TO POLAND; A FREQUENTLY UPDATED OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINDER OF THE SOVIET BLOC ... A GENERAL BRIEFING ON THE VOLATILE MIDDLE EAST; INFORMATION ON ANY OTHER SENSITIVE AREAS THE POPE WISHED TO BE INFORMED ABOUT."

THE POPE ACCEPTED AND THE BRIEFINGS BEGAN THE NEXT MONTH.

THE BOOK SAYS THE CIA FELL TEMPORARILY INTO DISFAVOR AFTER THE PONTIFF WAS SHOT BY MAHMET ALI AGCA IN MAY 1981.

THE ISRAELI INTELLIGENCE AGENCY MOSSAD HAD WARNED ITALIAN INTELLIGENCE THAT AGCA MIGHT TRY TO KILL THE POPE AND A SENIOR WEST GERMAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICER SAID THE CIA ALMOST CERTAINLY GOT A COPY OF THE WARNING; THE BOOK SAYS.

BUT THE CIA FAILED TO ALERT THE VATICAN; IT SAYS; AND VATICAN OFFICIALS WERE FURIOUS.

HOWEVER, AFTER THE POPE'S RECOVERY, THE CIA RETURNED TO FAVOR; IT ADDS.

THE BOOK SAYS TIES BETWEEN THE CIA AND THE VATICAN DATE BACK TO 1945, WHEN THE VATICAN ENLISTED THE OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES -- THE CIA'S FORERUNNER -- TO AID IN THE CHURCH'S ANTI-COMMUNIST CRUSADE.

IT SAYS THAT IN 1960, BEFORE BECOMING PONTIFF, POPE PAUL VI GAVE THE AGENCY A "TREASURE TROVE" OF FILES ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF PARISH PRIESTS.

"THIS BOUNTY ENABLED THE CIA TO BE EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE IN ITS CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT PRIESTS DEEMED SOFT ON COMMUNISM; AND TO REWARD THOSE PREPARED TO TOE THE AGENCY LINE," IT SAYS.

"THE CIA HAD A VAST SLUSH FUND -- CALLED 'PROJECT MONEY' -- WHICH ENABLED IT TO MAKE GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS TO CATHOLIC CHARITIES; SCHOOLS AND ORPHANAGES; AND EVEN TO PAY FOR THE RESTORATION OF CHURCH BUILDINGS," IT ADDS.

REUTERS
23 August 1984

VATICAN CONDEMNS BOOK ALLEGING POPE BRIEFED WEEKLY BY THE CIA
VATICAN CITY

THE VATICAN, IN AN UNUSUALLY QUICK RESPONSE, TODAY STRONGLY DENOUNCED A NEW BOOK THAT ASSERTS POPE JOHN PAUL RECEIVES A WEEKLY BRIEFING FROM THE CIA, CALLING IT "ABSURD AND DEVOID OF ANY FOUNDATION."

A STATEMENT BY THE DEPUTY VATICAN SPOKESMAN, THE REV. PIERFRANCO PASTORE, REFERRED TO THE BOOK "THE YEAR OF ARMAGEDDON" BY BRITISH AUTHORS GORDON THOMAS AND MAX MORGAN-WITTS PUBLISHED TODAY IN LONDON.

"REGARDING THE NEWS PUBLISHED IN THE BOOK IN QUESTION, ACCORDING TO WHICH THE POPE RECEIVES A REPORT EVERY FRIDAY FROM AN OFFICIAL OF THE CIA IN ROME WITH CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION, NEWS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ETC., I AM AUTHORIZED TO AFFIRM THAT IT IS ABSURD AND DEVOID OF ANY FOUNDATION," PASTORE SAID.